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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000512

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2016

TAGS: PREL AR PE

SUBJECT: PERUVIAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE VISITS ARGENTINA

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) On March 2, Peruvian presidential candidate Ollanta Humala visited Argentina during a campaign tour of the region and met with President Nestor Kirchner, Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez and Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana at the Casa Rosada. According to press reports, there are as many as 60,000 Peruvians living in Argentina who are eligible to vote in the April 9 elections. Humala traveled to Brazil following the meeting in Buenos Aires. An Argentine Foreign Ministry statement downplayed any political significance to the meeting, calling it a matter of "protocol" and Casa Rosada sources were quoted in the press as stating the meeting did not imply support for Humala's candidacy.

¶2. (U) In a press conference at his hotel later in the day, Humala described himself as a "nationalist" and that he "respected private property" and "sensible" foreign investment. He expressed support for MERCOSUR and said the region was witnessing a rebirth of leadership. "In some regions it is called indigenous, in others socialist; in Peru we are nationalists."

¶3. (C) Comment: Although the Casa Rosada stressed the meeting with Kirchner was strictly a matter of protocol and not an endorsement of Humala's candidacy, his willingness to do so is perhaps a result of lessons learned from the Evo Morales campaign. Kirchner had turned down a request for a similar meeting with Morales in the days prior to the Bolivian elections, first, because the GoA at that time still believed PODEMOS candidate Jorge Quiroga would eventually come out on top; and second, the GoA in the weeks immediately after the Summit of the Americas was looking for ways it could demonstrate that it was not totally coopted by Chavez and Morales-styled populism. The GoA was caught flatfooted by Morales's outright election victory and when Morales embarked on his pre-inaugural world tour, Argentina was, at first, left off the itinerary. When Morales finally did agree to a brief stopover in Buenos Aires, he pointedly noted he was not there to discuss gas and energy matters -- the GoA's main concern. The upcoming Peruvian elections offer Kirchner a chance to readjust his approach to another presidential candidate with a similar profile, and to hedge his bets in the face of an uncertain outcome. Ironically, local pundits have opined that Humala's visit to Argentina might actually hurt his campaign by bringing on accusations of outside interference. End Comment.

¶4. (U) To see more Buenos Aires reporting, visit our classified website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/buenosaires.>

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